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When kids ski, bargains and lessons meet on the slopes

BY ANNE Z. COOKE

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HAYDEN, COLO. — DILLON, Colo. - If you're one of those parents who decides where to ski based on the most generous "Kids Ski Free" package available for kids in the 5- to 12-year-old range, you're in luck. This year the following four resorts are among those who believe that today's young skiers are the future of the sport. Check them out and take your choice.

KEYSTONE SKI RESORT, Dillon, Colo.

This year the Kids Ski Free package at Keystone Resort, a Vail ski resort in Dillon, two hours west of Denver, takes the ribbon for simplicity. When you book a family stay for any number of days at Keystone, your children under 12 - whether you have two or six - get a free lift ticket for every day you're there. Even better, there are no blackout dates whatsoever, so you can visit the resort during any week, in any month throughout the season.

The lift tickets are good for skiing and snowboarding, and come with some bonus freebies. If your arrival day happens to coincide with night skiing, the lift tickets are free for everyone in your group, both kids and adults. Your status as a Keystone guest offers kids' ski rentals at a discount and front-of-the-line rental service at the pre-registered-guest desk. Also included for everyone are one-time vouchers to the ice skating rink, the Nordic Center and a yoga session (ice skates, cross country skis and snowshoe rentals are available but not included).

Most of Keystone's lodging is in the rental pool, so there are plenty of condominium types and sizes to choose from. Ski shuttles run all day to Keystone's main base, where the rental shop, ticket office, kids' ski school, restaurants and shops are located. Call direct to 855-223-4811 or 800-468-5014 or through the operator at 800-328-1323. For more, visit www.keystone.com.

STEAMBOAT SKI RESORT, Steamboat Springs, Colo.

Well known for its top-rated Kids' Ski School, Steamboat Resort's Kids Ski Free offer is not just a

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boon to families who want to ski together, but a significant partner in the goal of teaching kids what skiing's all about, from parallel carving to on-mountain sportsmanship. If the ski school is why you're bringing your kids to Steamboat, the Kids Ski free program only makes sense. So what are the rules?

For every parent, grandparent or adult who buys a five-day ski pass, a child 12 and under also earns a free lift pass. (Senior passes don't qualify for this deal.) Since lift ticket prices sold at the resort's ticket window can change, buy your lift tickets online and get the guaranteed price. If your kids have grown like Topsy - plenty of today's 12-year-olds look like high-schoolers - you may need a birth certificate or student ID to prove their ages.

With Steamboat Springs five minutes from Steamboat's base area, lodging at, on and around the ski area base and in town comes in all sizes and types, from hotels to condominiums. Shopping, dining and ski rentals are available at the base area and also in town. For more, go to www.steamboat.com. For tickets, email tickets@steamboat.com, or call 877-783-2628.

MT. BACHELOR ski resort, near Bend and Sun River, Ore.

Go wild and free at Mt. Bachelor, in the Deschutes National Forest, with the resort's Kids Ski Free program, for ages 12 and under. The offer, which pairs kids' lift tickets with the purchase of adult ski passes, matches one for one. When an adult, a parent or grandparent, buys a pass (three of five days for \$207, four of six days for \$259, five of seven days for \$304, or six of eight days for \$339), the child gets an identical pass at no charge. There are no blackout days during holidays and the only purchase rule is that the adult MUST buy the pass online, and four days in advance of arrival.

Go to the ticket window, show evidence of your purchase and pick up both adult and child's passes. All buyers and kids have to be present to get their passes. You'll need to find lodging in Bend or Sun River, both 22 miles away, so to save even more money - up to 45 percent - check out Mt. Bachelor's Lodging and Free Lift Ticket Package.

In fact, if you don't know anything about Mt. Bachelor, a snow-covered volcano in central Oregon's Cascade Range, prepare to be amazed. This huge ski area has 3,683 skiable acres, 11 high-speed lifts and 88 named trails. Ski rentals and restaurants are at the base area and on the mountain. If you're coming from sea level, Mt. Bachelor's moderate elevation - 5,700 feet at the base elevation and 9,065 feet at the top - makes adjusting easy. For mountain maps, facts, vacation plans and lodging information visit www.mtbachelor.com, or call 800-609-1472.

SNOWMASS RESORT, Colo.

Snowmass Resort, a pioneer in encouraging young families to bring their kids and to enroll them in lessons, was one of the first ski resorts to make it easier by offering free skiing to kids ages 5 to 12. Which is one of the reasons we've spent so many winters here, skiing at Snowmass, Aspen and Buttermilk. But each year the offers change just a little.

This year's Kids Ski Free package is designed for families who plan to buy a lodging package. If they rent skis for their kids at Four Mountain Sports, in Snowmass Village, the kids get a free lift ticket for every day of the rental. If it's for seven days, they're entitled to a group lesson at 30 percent off the regular price. To learn more, call a "vacation specialist" at Stay AspenSnowmass, at 800-290-1326.

And the small print? For a ski trip before Feb. 28, 2016, you must book the deal by Dec. 1. For a trip after March 1, book by Jan. 30. The offer is valid from Nov. 26, 2015 to April 17, 2016 except for blackout dates: Dec. 26, 2015-Jan. 1, 2016, and Feb. 7-13, 2016. Does the lift ticket and lodging package make economic sense? Yes, if you can squeeze in extra friends. Ask for a price break-out for each item - the condo, ski rentals and lift tickets - and then decide. For more, call 800-891-9205 or 888-649-5982. Visit at www.aspensnowmass.com.

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